Commentaries on The Burning Wheel

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Advice

Beliefs and Instincts

The term "beliefs" is a misnomer; "goals" would be more accurate. Beliefs are specific actions you want your character to take. They are best expressed as qualified verb statements (i.e., "because X, I will Y").

Instincts act like you would expect beliefs to. They cause your character to react to the world based on their values and experiences. They are best expressed as "if/then," "always," or "never" statements.

An effective set of beliefs for characters to maintain is as follows:

- ❖ **Core:** An overarching lifetime ambition.
- ❖ **Situational:** A path to resolving the current situation within 1–3 sessions.
- ❖ **Character:** An intent for another player character within 1–3 sessions.

Character Burning

For a more holistic and less tedious experience, consider the following:

- ❖ Don't plan out your lifepath selections. Experience your character's life as they did (albeit in an abridged fashion).
- ❖ Spend all skill and trait points from a lifepath only within that lifepath.
- ❖ At the GM's discretion, bank general skill points and unspent trait points for use during play. Unspent trait points must first be used to purchase any unpurchased lifepath traits.

For new players, premade characters work best. Reserve time at the beginning of the session for players to write beliefs tailored to the situation. Have players focus on their BITs and teach mechanics as they come up.

Playing the Game

The criteria for earning artha identified on *Burning Wheel* page 71 also serve as instructions for playing the game. Consult them if you are at a loss for what to do or are worried you aren't playing the game right.

To generate maximum artha, play to lose! Write beliefs and instincts that are contradictory, delusional, or doomed to fail. Put yourself in situations where you probably won't get what you want. Keep in mind you get artha and advancement regardless of whether you succeed.

House Rules

Artha Rewards

This is an alternative set of criteria for earning artha that (mostly) ties BITs directly into tests. Using these criteria, artha is rewarded immediately instead of at the end of the session. You do not get artha if the GM just says yes.

Fate

- ❖ **Hospitality:** Host the game space, bring food to share at the table, or otherwise contribute to the at-table experience.
- ❖ **Belief:** Make a test with an intent that brings you one step closer to accomplishing a belief.
- ❖ **Instinct:** Activate an instinct to immediately make a relevant test.
- ❖ **Trait:** When you make a test, modify its intent, task, or consequence to match a character trait.
- ❖ **Right Skill, Right Time:** Make a test because you're the only person at the table who is capable of its task.

Persona

- ❖ **Belief:** Make a test with an intent that accomplishes a belief.
- ❖ **Moldbreaker:** Make a test with an intent that prevents you from ever reasonably accomplishing a belief. Change that belief.
- ❖ **Workhorse:** Make the most tests over the course of a situation. Break ties with advancement, relative obstacles, successes, and dice rolled, in that order.
- ❖ **Embodiment:** Nominate one player via group vote at the end of each session.

Deeds

- ❖ **Greater Goal:** Make a test with an intent that resolves the situation.
- ❖ **Beyond the Call:** Make one of *those* tests. You know the type: When you roll fistfuls of dice against an impossible obstacle, because this is *it* baby!

Downtime

As-written, practice is far too complex for my tastes, especially when you factor in the other activities that take up a character's time. I cribbed this alternative from a [discussion](#) on the *Burning Wheel* forums between Fuseboy and Dean.

- ❖ **Downtime Days:** Days your character is not actively engaged in the situation count as downtime days. Downtime days can be spent to perform the activities identified in Table 1.
- ❖ **Practice:** You cannot practice a given ability more than once per day.

> ➢ To earn advancement via practice, you must use the appropriate practice activity the number of times shown in Table 2.
- ❖ **Instruction:** Each day of Instruction counts as the equivalent practice activity.
  - ➢ Instruction is always faster than practice.
- ❖ **Demanding:** These activities require special accommodations (e.g., dead weight, cannot travel, high-obstacle lifestyle).

Table 1: Downtime Activities

Activity	Days	Demanding	Notes
Routine Practice	0.3	No	0.5 days if Faith/Sorcerous.
Difficult Practice	0.5	No	1.0 days if Faith/Sorcerous.
Challenging Practice	1.0	Yes	—
Bonus Practice	Free	No	❖ Counts as Routine Practice. ❖ Cannot use if performing a demanding activity in the same day.
Get a Job	0.6	No	—
Recover	1.0	Yes	—
The Sickness	1.0	Yes	Recover all Forte tax. Mark Health advancement against an Ob equal to tax.
Travel	0.3	No	0.6 days for forced marches or harsh terrain.

Table 2: Practices Needed for Advancement

Skill	Practices
Academic	180
Artisan	360
Artist	180
Craftsman	360
Forester	180
Martial	30
Medicinal	360
Military	180
Musical	30
Peasant	180
Physical	30
School of Thought	180
Seafaring	30
Social	30
Sorcerous	360
Special/Misc.	30
Agility	30

Skill	Practices
Forte	30
Perception	180
Power	30
Speed	30
Will	360
Faith	360
Steel	30

Lifestyle

For each Resources cycle:

- ❖ **Beginning:** Pick a lifestyle with an obstacle equal to or less than your Resources exponent.
- ❖ **During:** You enjoy assets equivalent to those listed under the chosen obstacle. Only test Resources for purchases not covered by your lifestyle.
- ❖ **End:** Test Resources against your lifestyle obstacle.

Practical Magic

Practical Magic (Codex 263) replaces the standard mechanics for both Sorcery and Rituals of Night. The intent is to make magic consistent across the board (i.e., skills-based). I included a list of skills available to sorcerers in my Complete Lists Index.

- ❖ **Subtlety Clause:** Ignore the clause that Practical Magic must be subtle and low-key.
- ❖ **Sorcerous Skills:** Practical Magic allows the use of all sorcerous skills. Sorcery tests proxying for sorcerous skills are never open-ended.
- ❖ **Push the Limit:** A sorcerer can ignore the double obstacle penalty for not having tools by instead adding the test's obstacle to their tax obstacle. Pushing the limit causes tax even on a success.
- ❖ **Creative Thaumaturgy:** A sorcerer can declare a wholly magical intent and task, then test Sorcery. These tests are never open-ended, cause tax even on a success, and carry dire magical consequences on a failure.
  - ➤ **Destroy with Sorcerous Fire:** Creative thaumaturgy allows Sorcery to be used as a weapon in Bloody Versus and Fight:
    - ▪ **Bloody Versus:** Counts as a longer length weapon and shield.
    - ▪ **Fight:** Power is sorcerer's Will, VA 2, DoF as bow, length longest, range as bow. Add can be used to increase damage (+1 Power each), increase VA (+1 VA per 2 successes), or modify the DoF (+1 each).
- ❖ **Void Embrace:** Sorcerers with Void Embrace can use of Blood Magic.

Meta

Alternate Bibliography

Fiction
- ❖ George R.R. Martin, *A Song of Ice and Fire*
- ❖ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*
- ❖ Patrick Rothfuss, *The Kingkiller Chronicle*

Music
- ❖ Altar of Oblivion, *Barren Grounds*
- ❖ Atlantean Kodex, *The Course of the Empire*
- ❖ Below, *Upon a Pale Horse*
- ❖ Candlemass, *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*
- ❖ Crypt Sermon, *Out of the Garden*
- ❖ Dolven, *Navigating the Labyrinth*
- ❖ DoomSword, *Let Battle Commence*
- ❖ Funeral Circle, *Funeral Circle*
- ❖ Gatekeeper, *Prophecy and Judgement*
- ❖ Scald, *Will of the Gods is Great Power*
- ❖ Smoulder, *Times of Obscene Evil and Wild Daring*
- ❖ Solitude Aeternus, *Through the Darkest Hour*
- ❖ Sorcerer, *Anno 1503*
- ❖ Stone Magnum, *From Time… To Eternity*
- ❖ Wheel, *Wheel*

Hub and Spokes

By Luke's own admission, the hub and spokes of *The Burning Wheel* are robust enough to be its own generic roleplaying system. A proficient GM could put blank character sheets in front of the players and begin play right then! Consider the following:

- ❖ The game can't break so long as BITs are still being expressed and challenged in meaningful ways.
- ❖ Ignore the lists; skills and traits can be invented, assigned, and given exponents on the fly. If a subsystem uses specific skills, substitute those invented at your table.
- ❖ Lifepaths can be reduced to freeform titles and used to simulate any genre. Assets can be invented and provided as appropriate to a character's concept.
- ❖ Any stock can be emulated by developing a set of traits, skills, and an emotional attribute at the table. Apply it like a template that can be updated in real time.

Introducing The Game

- ❖ **Character-Driven:** It's a game about realistic, well-rounded, and imperfect characters. Once character creation is over, the story of the game becomes the characters fighting for their beliefs while the GM makes their lives complicated.
- ❖ **Roleplay-Heavy:** It's a game that encourages roleplaying not just theoretically, but mechanically. When a character does things that are interesting, compelling, or get them in trouble, their player is rewarded with points to spend and invest.
- ❖ **Crunchy:** It's a complex game where the minutia of daily life is just as important as action and conflict. There are 371 skills, which grow organically as you use them and can be learned over time.
- ❖ **Low-Fantasy:** It's a game where the fantasy dial can be turned up and down, but playing a humans-only, low-to-no magic game is always a solid, satisfying option. Think more *Game of Thrones* and less *Dungeons & Dragons*.
- ❖ **Collaborative:** It's a game that focuses on a few characters at a time and expects everyone to pay attention and provide input. There are no secrets in this game: Metagaming is required to get the most out of the story.